

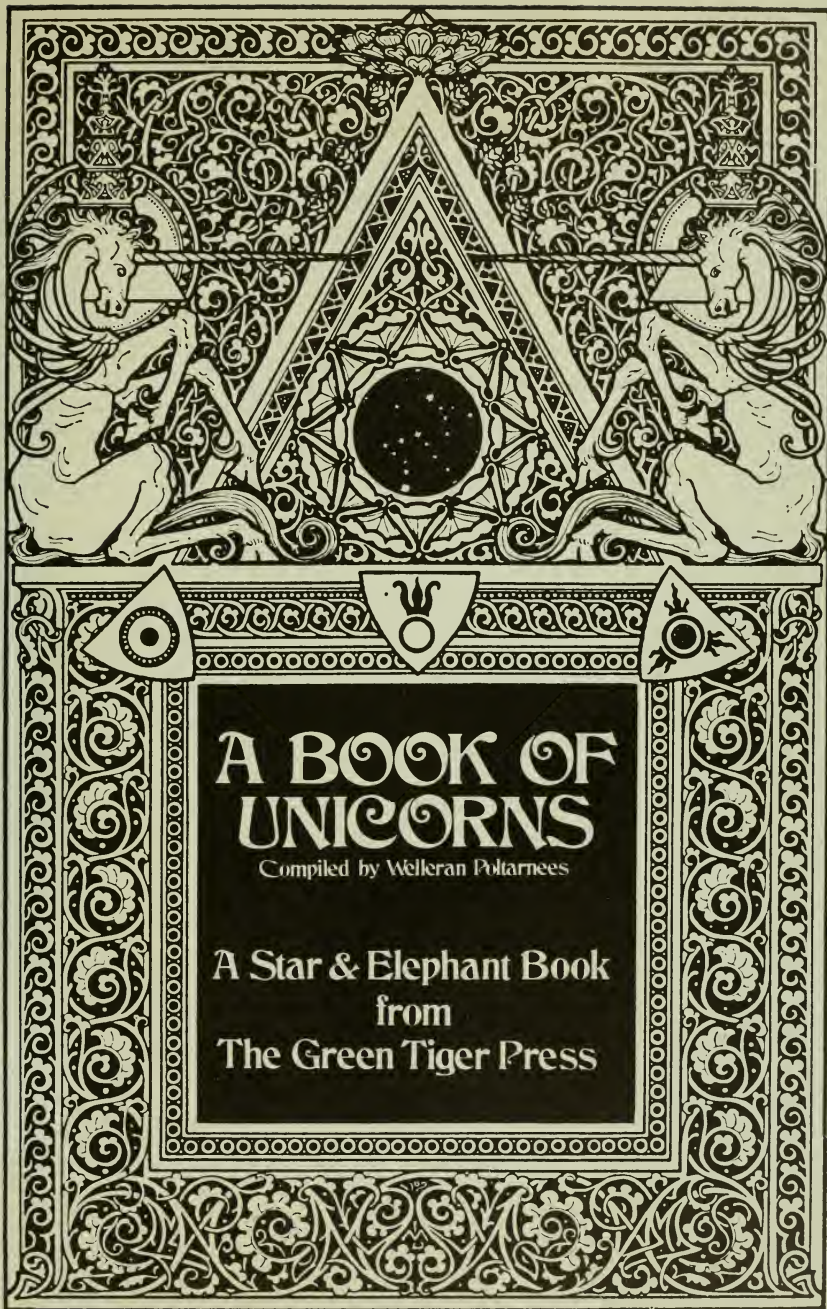
# A BOOK OF UNICORNS





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# A BOOK OF UNICORNS

Compiled by Welleran Poltarnees

A Star & Elephant Book  
from  
The Green Tiger Press



*Sybil Rebman  
from Animal Alphabet*

*We are grateful to Rüdiger Robert Beer  
for his informative book, The Unicorn: Myth and Reality  
and for the trouble he took in correcting  
errors in the first edition of  
our Book of Unicorns.*

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IT WAS A  
MAGICAL BEAST

## *Preface*

*This book attempts to present the mystery of the Unicorn rather than to unravel it. This is a succinct gathering of the most important writings on the Unicorn in the 2300 years since he was first described. We present these texts without annotation, hoping by this to allow for clear perception and unhindered personal response. We have chosen the pictures principally for their historical importance.*



*Leonardo da Vinci*

*facing page:  
Michael Hague*

## Introduction

If God had not created the Unicorn, man would have invented him, for he has a form and nature that must exist. It is not just that he is rare, for the hippocampus is rare and he has not inflamed the imaginations of mankind for thousands of years. It is not merely that he has magical properties, for the basilisk has such powers and he does not inhabit the dreams of artists and ordinary people through a hundred generations. We will the Unicorn into being because he pleases us. His form is central to his rightness. Various of the descriptions of Unicorns, as you will discover in the collection, ascribe to the Unicorn a variety of bizarre characteristics: elephant's feet, a goat's beard, a swine's tale, a bullock's body. Most of the pictures, as you will also discover, do not show him so featured. Almost always he is simply a horse with a single horn in the middle of his forehead. This is his Platonic form and no matter how energetically one tries to escape it, one returns to it. The oriental Unicorn is an exception to this, but a different esthetic is operative here and to the Oriental mind this bizarre creature must seem shapely and inevitable.

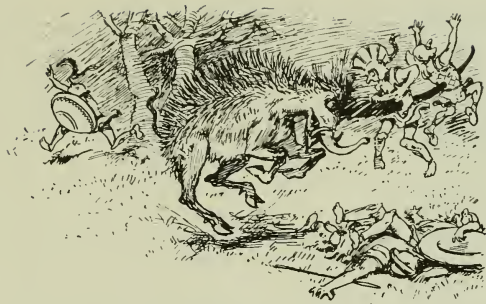
The second characteristic of the Unicorn which recommends him to mankind's love is his purity. He is pure because he is rare, distant, untouched. He is not rare from biological inadaptability or geographical accident. He is rare because it is the expression and fulfillment of his nature. He could not bear being common, seen, and we could not bear having him so. He is pure and this necessitates his distance from the world. His vulnerability is an expression of his purity. We love him because he is taken and defeated not by strength but by another purity. We love him for his innocence, and whiteness is the proper coat for innocence to wear.

—Welleran Poltarnees



Albrecht Durer  
from Emperor Maximilian's Prayer Book





*"Now the unicorn loved virtue, and 't is said he wouldn't hurt you  
If he felt assured your conscience was in a healthy state;  
But your ancient Greek and Roman in pure badness yield to no man,  
And when they met the unicorn they met an awful fate!*

*One evening in the gloaming, when the unicorn was roaming  
Where through rocky gorges, foaming, the Acis seeks the sea,  
He spied a lovely maiden, her arms with flowers laden,  
Who came walking slowly toward him from beneath a laurel-tree.  
And when he saw this virgin from beneath the tree emergin',  
He came and knelt before her, and quickly fell asleep."*

*—from "The Capture of the Unicorn," by Edwin Julian*



Reginald Birch  
illustration for "The Capture of the Unicorn" (1898)



here are in India certain wild asses which are as large as horses, and larger. Their bodies are white, their heads dark red, and their eyes dark blue. They have a horn on the forehead which is about a foot and a half in length. The dust filed from this horn is administered in a potion as a protection against deadly drugs. The base of this horn, for some two hands'-breadth above the brow, is pure white; the upper part is sharp and of a vivid crimson; and the remainder, or middle portion, is black. Those who drink out of these horns, made into drinking vessels, are not subject, they say, to convulsions or to the holy disease (epilepsy). Indeed, they are immune even to poisons if, either before or after swallowing such, they drink wine, water, or anything else from these beakers. Other asses, both the tame and the wild, and in fact all animals with solid hoofs, are without the ankle-bone and have no gall in the liver, but these have both the ankle-bone and the gall. This ankle-bone, the most beautiful I have ever seen, is like that of an ox in general appearance and in size, but it is as heavy as lead and its colour is that of cinnabar through and through. The animal is exceedingly swift and powerful, so that no creature, neither the horse nor any other, can overtake it."

—Ctesias, (4th century B.C.) the twenty-fifth fragment of *Indica*

The Orsæan Indians hunt an exceedingly wild beast called the monoceros, which has a stag's head, elephant's feet, and a boar's tail, the rest of its body being like that of a horse. It makes a deep lowing noise, and one black horn two cubits long projects from the middle of its forehead. This animal, they say, cannot be taken alive.

Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.)  
*Historia Naturalis*



They say that there are mountains in the interior regions of India which are inaccessible to men and therefore full of wild beasts. Among these is the unicorn, which they call the 'cartazon.' This animal is as large as a full-grown horse, and it has a mane, tawny hair, feet like those of the elephant, and the tail of a goat. It is exceedingly swift of foot. Between its brows there stands a single black horn, not smooth but with certain natural rings, and tapering to a very sharp point. Of all animals, this one has the most dissonant voice. With beasts of other species that approach it the 'cartazon' is gentle, but it fights with those of its own kind, and not only do the males fight naturally among themselves but they contend even against the females and push the contest to the death. The animal has great strength of body, and it is armed besides with an unconquerable horn. It seeks out the most deserted places and wanders there alone. In the season of rut it grows gentle toward the chosen female and they pasture side by side, but when this time is over he becomes wild again and wanders alone. They say that the young ones are sometimes taken to the king to be exhibited in contests on days of festival, because of their strength, but no one remembers the capture of a single specimen of mature age.

Aelian (2nd Century A.D.)  
De Animalium Natura



J. van der Straet (engraved by J. Collaert)  
Unicorn Hunt in India (16th century)

*But the cruellest is the Unicorne, a Monster that belloweth horribly, bodyed like a horse, footed like an Eliphant, tayled like a Swayne, and headed like a Stagge. His horne sticketh out of the midds of hys forehead, of a wonderful brightness about foure foote long, so sharp, that whatsoever he pusheth at, he striketh it through easily. He is never caught alive; kyllled he may be, but taken he cannot bee.*

*Julius Solinus (3rd Century A.D.)*

**Polyhistoria**



*Virgin and Unicorn (Spanish, 16th century)*

*On the Canadian border, there are sometimes seen animals resembling horses, but with cloven hoofs, rough manes, a long straight horn upon the forehead, a curled tail like that of the wild boar, black eyes, and a neck like that of the stag. They live in the loneliest wildernesses and are so shy that the males do not even pasture with the females except in the season of rut, when they are not so wild. As soon as this season is past, however, they fight not only with other beasts but even with those of their own kind.*

*Olfert Dapper*

**Die Unbekante Neue Welt (1673)**

*facing page:*

*The Unicorn in winter*

*by S.W.D. (1976)*



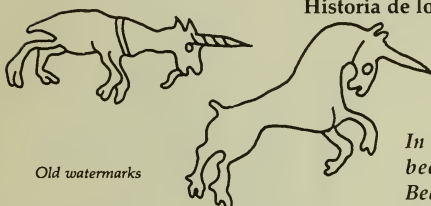




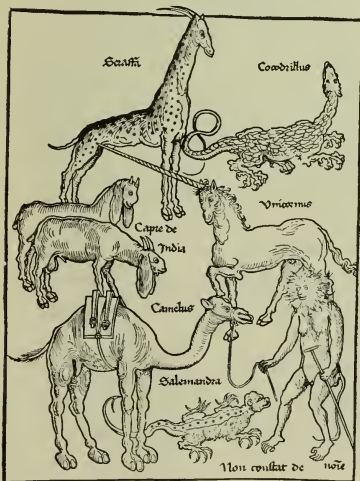
The reason why so few men have ever seen them is that these mountains are almost inaccessible. They are quite different from the pictures of them to be seen in Europe, for they are only slightly smaller than elephants and their feet are like those of the elephant. Their general characteristics remind one of swine, for they love to wallow in the mire. On the brow there is one horn, heavy and large but tapering to a point and black in hue. The animal's tongue is rough with spines that tear whatever it licks like a teasel—an excellent emblem of flatterers! . . . It is true that Saint Thomas and Saint Gregory and other holy men consider this unicorn identical with the Rhinoceros, but we must remember that they were chiefly concerned with moral matters and the welfare of the soul and that it was not their business to distinguish the species of animals.

Fray Luis de Urreta

*Historia de los Reynos de la Etiopia* (1610)



Old watermarks



Erhard Reuwich  
"Animals of the Holy Land"  
from Breydenbach, *Reise ins Heilige Land* (Mainz, 1486)

In the Province of Agaus has been seen the Unicorn, that Beast so much talk'd of and so little known; the prodigious Swiftmess with which this Creature runs from one Wood into another has given me no Opportunity of examining it particularly, yet I have had so near a sight of it as to be able to give some Description of it. The Shape is the same as that of a beautiful Horse, exact and nicely proportion'd, of a Bay Colour, with a black Tail, which in some Provinces is long, in others very short; some have long Manes hanging to the Ground. They are so Timorous that they never Feed but surround with other Beasts that defend them.

Jeronimo Lobo

*A Voyage to Abyssinia* (1735)

*Among the Mountains of the Moon in High Ethiopia, there is found a beast called the unicorn which is as large as a colt of two years and of the same general shape as one. Its colour is ashen and it has a mane and a large beard like that of a he-goat; on its brow it has a smooth white horn of the colour of ivory two cubits long and adorned with handsome grooves that run from base to point. This horn is used against poison, and people say that the other animals wait until this one comes and dips its horn in the water before they will drink. It is such a clever beast and so swift that there is no way of killing it, but it sheds its horns like the stag and the hunters find these in the wilderness.*

Marmol Caravaial  
 Descripcion General de Affrica (1573)



Jean Cocteau  
 "La Dame a la Licorne" (1953)

*I have seen in a place like a Park adjoining unto prester Iohns Court, three score and seventeene Vnicornes and eliphants all alive at one time, and they were so tame that I have played with them as one would play with young Lambes.*

Edward Webbe  
 His Traveiles (1590)

*The one of them, which is much hygher than the other, yet not much unlyke to a coolte of thyrtye moneths of age, in the forehead groweth only one horne, in maner ryght foorth, of the length of three cubites. The other is much younger, of the age of one yeere, and lyke a young Coolte: the horne of this is of the length of foure handfuls. This beast is of the coloure of a horse of weesel coloure, and hath the head lyke an hart, but no long necke, a thynne mane hangynge only on the one syde. Theyr legges are thyn and slender, lyke a fawne or hynde. The hoofes of the fore feete are divided in two, much lyke the feet of a Goat. The outwarde part of the hynder feete is very full of heare. This beast doubtlesse seemeth wylde and fierce, yet tempereth that fiercenesse with a certain comelinesse. These Unicornes one gave to the Soltan of Mecha as a most precious and rare gyfte. They were sent hym out of Ethiope by a kynge of that Countrey, who desired by that present to gratifie the Soltan of Mecha.*

Lewis Vartoman  
 Itinerario (1576)





"You shouldn't moo like that!" said Cynthia one day. "What sort of colt are you? Your legs are just as thin as a little deer's legs and your feet are split like a deer's, too. And if you don't look out you'll have a beard like a goat!"

And she tugged at the wisp hanging down from its small chin.

"Your tail isn't right either," she went on. "It's lions that have tufts on their tails. And I never saw a colt before with blue eyes and a horn in the middle of its forehead."

But even as she spoke she had the strangest feeling that somewhere she had seen just such a creature, perhaps in a picture. But where that picture was or what the creature was called she could not, no matter how hard she tried, ever remember, nor, though she searched through all her books, could she find it.

She threw her arms remorsefully around the colt's white neck.

"Never mind," she said. "You're prettier than Jim's colt. You're the most beautiful thing in the world!"

by Dorothy Lathrop from *The Colt from Moon Mountain*

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*He is an enemy of Lions, wherefore as soon as ever a Lion seeth a Unicorn, he runneth to a tree for succour, that so when the Unicorn maketh force at him, he may not only avoid his horn but also destroy him; for the Unicorn in the swiftnes of his course runneth against a tree, wherein his sharp horn sticketh fast. Then when the Lion seeth the Unicorn fastened by the horn, without all danger he falleth upon him and killeth him.*

Edward Topsell  
History of Four Footed Beasts (1607)

*"Like as a Lyon whose imperial powre  
A proud rebellious Unicorn refyes,  
T'avoid the rash assault and wrathful stowre  
Of his fiers foe, him to a tree applyes,  
And when him ronning in full course he spyes  
He slips aside: the whiles that furious beast  
His precious horne, sought of his enemyes,  
Strikes in the stocke, ne thence can be releast,  
But to the mighty victor yields a bounteous feast."*

– Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*

*"Before you win my daughter and the half of my kingdom," said the King, "you must accomplish yet another heroic deed. You must capture a unicorn that is at large in the wood and doing great harm there."*

*The tailor took a halter and an axe and started for the wood, telling the party that was with him to wait outside. The unicorn came in sight immediately, and made for the tailor as if to gore him without ceremony.*

*"Steady, steady," cried the tailor. "Not so quick!"*

*He stood still and waited till the animal was quite close, and then sprang nimbly behind a tree. The unicorn made a frantic rush at the tree and gored it so firmly with his horn that he could not get it out again, and so was caught.*

*"Now I've got you, my fine bird," said the tailor, coming from behind the tree. He put the halter round the beast's neck, cut its horn out of the tree, and when all this was done led the animal home to the king.*

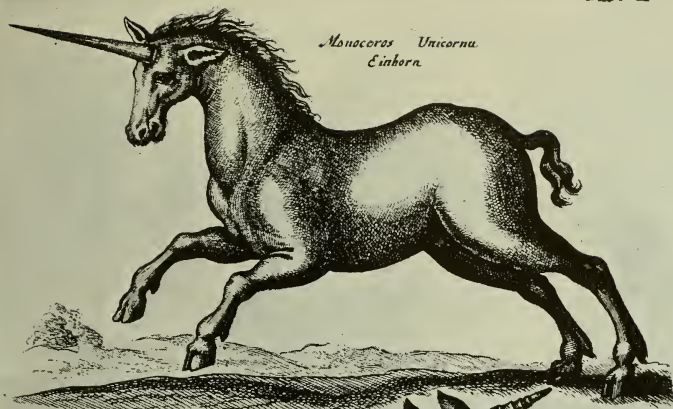
*The Brothers Grimm  
The Brave Little Tailor*

facing page:  
*"Now I've got my bird" said the Tailor*  
by Kay Nielsen (1886-1957)  
from *Hansel and Gretel*





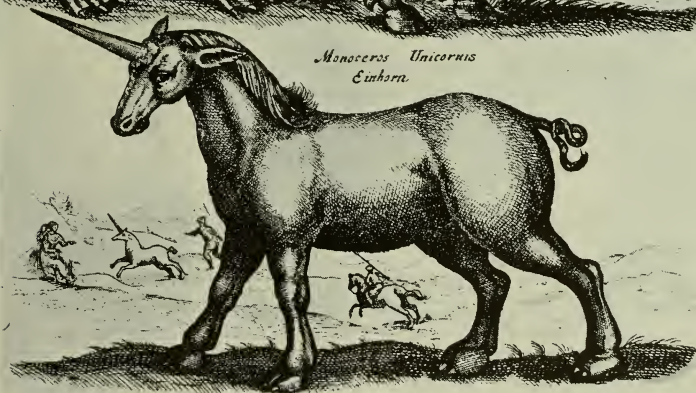




*Monoceros Unicorni  
Einhorn*



*Capricornus Maring  
Neer Steinbock*



*Monoceros Unicornis  
Einhorn*

The Japanese Unicorn, from an old pin drawing



*"The ki-lin is like a large deer with a single horn in the middle of his forehead. He is therefore known as the Chinese unicorn. He is a leader of all the animals and yet he is so gentle that he lifts his feet high when he walks so that he will not step on anything he might injure. He has a sweet, bell-like voice."*

*—Robin Palmer, from Dragons, Unicorns, and Other Magical Beasts*

*"The Lin springs from the earth's central regions. It is a beast of superior integrity, is attached to its mother, and reducible to rule. The Shu King, quoting Lin Li, says the Lin has a Kiun's body, an ox's tail, a horse's feet, and a yellow colour, round hooves, and one horn; the tip of the horn is erect and fleshy.*

*"Its call in the middle part thereof is like a monastery bell. Its pace is regular; it rambles only on selected grounds and after it has examined the locality. It will not live in herds, or be accompanied in its movements. It cannot be beguiled into pitfalls, or captured in snares. When the monarch is virtuous, this beast appears."*

*—from the Li Ki, commenting on Fuh Kien's Ho Chwen*

*facing page:*

*A Chinese painting of the Lin (the female of the Chinese unicorn)*







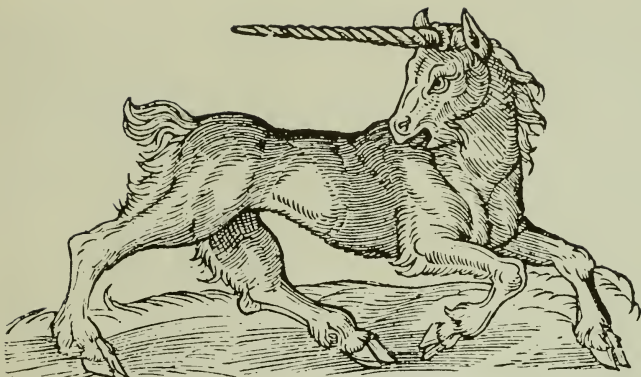


Illustration from a German translation of  
Albertus Magnus' *Summa de Creaturis* (1545)



This unicorn is Christ whose might, typified by its horn, is irresistible. Thus, in this connection, Isaiah 2:23 ends with the words "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of!" and the psalm tells us he is as beloved as the offspring of unicorns; of which Numbers 23:22 (Luther's version) also states that his joyousness is as the joyousness of the unicorn. Jewish unicorns, particularly faithful to the law, were the ascendants of Mary and her son, the only-begotten of God, the Father who said, according to Matthew 3:17: "This is my beloved son." This unicorn appeared wild and unruly when, at the mere thought of Lucifer's arrogance, it drove Adam out of the Garden of Eden for biting the apple, and destroyed the original world with the Flood. Thus also did it destroy the Sodomites with hellfire and brimstone. Thus did that unicorn rampage in heaven and on earth until our glorious Virgin accepted it into her lap when it entered her citadel, that is to say into the womb of her chaste body so that she could nurse it in her bosom and drape it with modest flesh, wherein in accordance with divine decree the unseizable creature might be captured by its hunters, namely by Jews and Gentiles, and yield voluntarily to death by crucifixion. Thus for example, in Job 39:9-24 "Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his hand in the furrow? . . . He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage." Thus Christ died from the rage he felt against sinners.

Albertus Magnus (13th Century)



Swiss Garden-of-Eden rug, ca. 1500, Kunstgewerbemuseum, West Berlin

*There is an animal called dajja, extremely gentle, which the hunters are unable to capture because of its great strength. It has in the middle of its brow a single horn. But observe the ruse by which the huntsmen take it. They lead forth a young virgin, pure and chaste, to whom, when the animal sees her, he approaches, throwing himself upon her. Then the girl offers him her breasts, and the animal begins to suck the breasts of the maiden and to conduct himself familiarly with her. Then the girl, while sitting quietly, reaches forth her hand and grasps the horn on the animal's brow, and at this point the huntsmen come up and take the beast and go away with him to the king.—Likewise the Lord Christ has raised up for us a horn of salvation in the midst of Jerusalem, in the house of God, by the intercession of the Mother of God, a virgin pure, chaste, full of mercy, immaculate, inviolate.*

**The Physiologus**  
(Provençal Version—13th Century)

facing page:  
Santa Justina  
by Moretta de Brescia (1498-1554)

Courtesy of the Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna





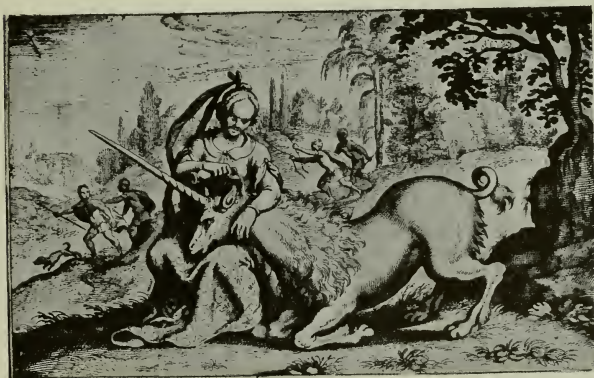


*Fifteenth century, Basel*

*Rynoceron in grewe [i.e. in Greek] is to meanynge an Horne in the nose. & Monoceros is an Unycorne: and is a ryght cruell beast. And hath that name for he hath in the mydull of the forehed an horne of foure fote long. And that horne is so sharpe & so stronge that he throwyth downe al or thyrleth at that he resyth on. . . . And this beest fyghtyth ofte wyth the Elyphaunt and woundyth & stycketh hym in the wombe, and throwyth hym downe to the grounde: And the Unycorn is so stronge that he is not take with myghte of hunters. But men that wryte of kynde of thinges meane that a mayde is sette there he shall come: And she openyth her lappe and the Unycorne layeth theron his heed, and levyth all his fyerinesse & slepyth in that wyse: And is taken as a beest wythout wepen & slayne wyth dartys of hunters.*

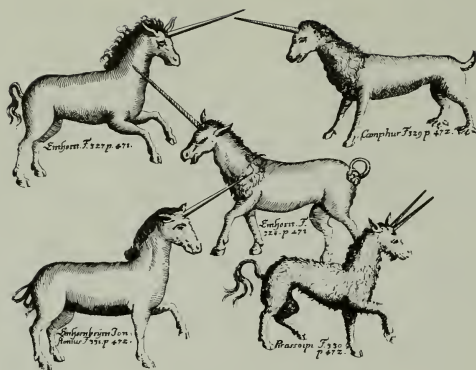
*Isidore of Seville (Died 636)*

*Origines (translated by John of Trevisa)*



*from Catalan's Histoire de la Licorne (1624)*





Peter Pomot's *Histoire des Drogues* (Paris, 1694)

There is an animal that is called a monoceros in Greek and in Latin truly a unicorn. Physiologus says that the unicorn has this nature. He is a small animal, like a kid, but exceedingly fierce, with one horn in the middle of his head; and no hunter is able to capture him. Yet he may be taken in this manner: men lead a virgin maiden to the place where he most resorts and they leave her in the forest alone. As soon as the unicorn sees her he springs into her lap and embraces her. Thus he is taken captive and exhibited in the palace of the king.

In this way Our Lord Jesus Christ, the spiritual unicorn, descended into the womb of the Virgin and through her took on human flesh. He was captured by the Jews and condemned to die on the cross. Concerning him David . . . says 'But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn.' And Zacharias says 'He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David' [Luke 1:69]. . . Moreover the one horn that he has on his head signifies the words of the Saviour: 'I and my Father are one' [John 10:30]. . . They say that he is exceedingly fierce, and this means that neither Principalities nor Powers nor Thrones . . . not the most subtle devil nor Hell could hold [him] against his will. Moreover they say that he is a small animal and this is because of the humility [of Christ] in his incarnation; concerning this he said, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart' [Matthew 11:29]. . . Only by the wish of the Father did he descend into the womb of the Virgin Mary for our salvation.

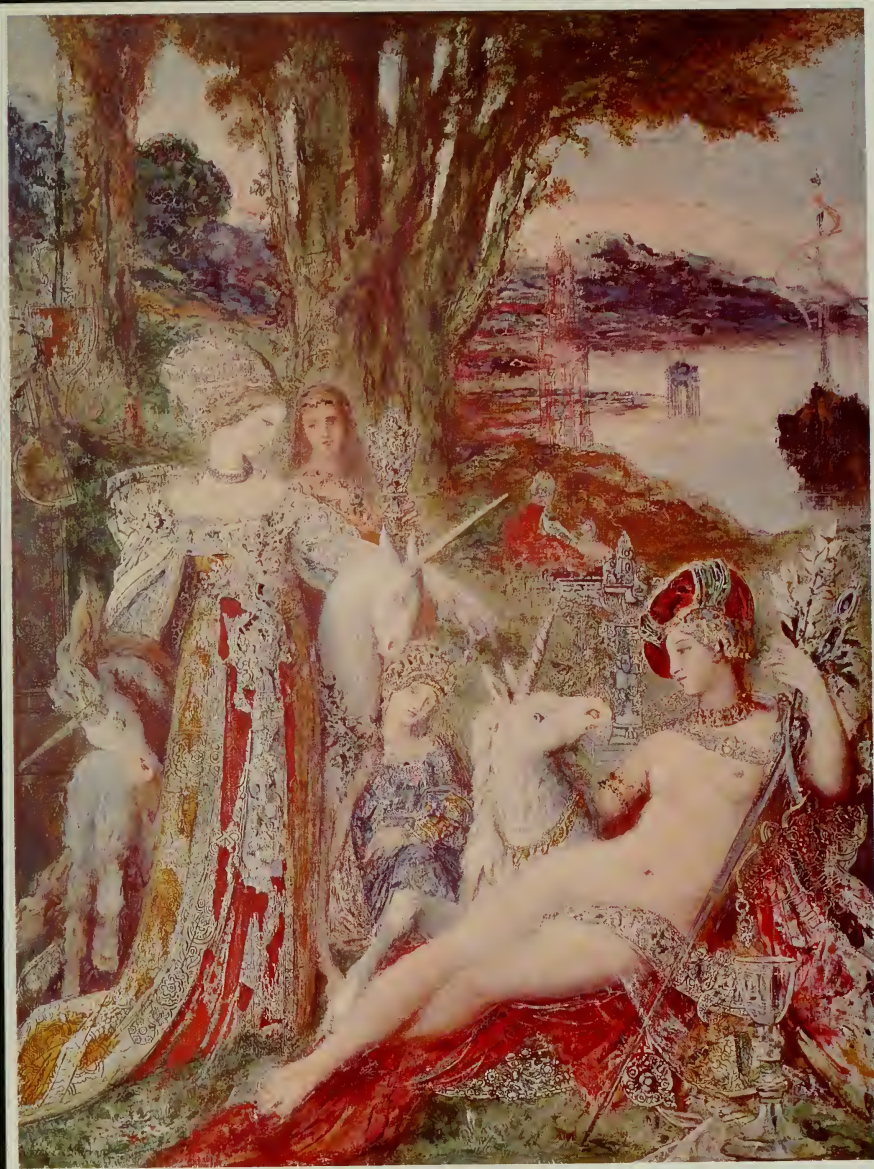
#### Physiologus (9th Century)

facing page:

Les Licornes

by Gustav Moreau

Reproduced courtesy of the Musée Gustav Moreau





*I have been drawn to you by your sweet odour alone, as the unicorn falls asleep under the influence of a maiden's fragrance. For this is the nature of the unicorn, that no other beast is so hard to capture, and he has one horn on his nose which no armour can withstand, so that no one dares to go forth against him except a virgin girl. And as soon as he is made aware of her presence by the scent of her, he kneels humbly before her and humiliates himself as though to signify that he would serve her. Therefore wise huntsmen who know his nature set a virgin in his way; he falls asleep in her lap; and while he sleeps the hunters, who would not dare to approach him when awake, come up and kill him. Even so has Love dealt cruelly with me; for I have been the proudest man alive with regard to love, and I have thought never to see the woman whom I should care to possess. . . . But Love, the skilful huntsman, has set in my path a maiden in the odour of whose sweetness I have fallen asleep, and I die the death to which I was doomed.*

*Richard de Fournival (13th Century)  
Bestiaire d'Amour*



*Pisanello  
from Innocence Protects the Unicorn (15th century)*





*Virgin and Unicorn*  
from *Hortus Sanitatis* (Mainz, 1491)

"... To the medieval man, with his love of symbolism and hidden meanings, the unicorn had both an erotic and a religious significance. It was a swift, unconquerable beast which could be tamed only by a virgin. When it was captured and chained, it stood for a consummated marriage..."

—from an article in an undated clipping: from an old issue of *Life*

*I stood in the Maytime meadows  
By roses circled round,  
Where many a fragile blossom  
Was bright upon the ground;  
And as though the roses called them  
And their wild hearts understood,  
The little birds were singing  
In the shadows of the wood.  
The nightingale among them  
Sang sweet and loud and long,  
Until a greater voice than hers  
Rang out above her song;  
For suddenly, between the crags,  
Along the narrow vale,  
The echoes of a hunting horn  
Came clear upon the gale.  
The hunter stood beside me  
Who blew that mighty horn;  
I saw that he was hunting  
The gentle unicorn —*

*But the unicorn is noble,  
He knows his gentle birth,  
He knows that God has chosen him  
Above all beasts of earth.  
The unicorn is noble;  
He keeps him safe and high  
Upon a narrow path and steep  
Climbing to the sky;  
And there no man can take him,  
He scorns the hunter's dart,  
And only a virgin's magic power  
Shall tame his haughty heart.  
What would be now the state of us  
But for his Unicorn,  
And what would be the fate of us,  
Poor sinners, lost, forlorn?  
Oh, may He lead us on and up,  
Unworthy though we be,  
Into His Father's kingdom,  
To dwell eternally!*

—popular German ballad

facing page:  
Geraldine Blake  
After an enameled bas-relief by Armand Point (1860-1932)







*The Lion-sun flies from the rising Unicorn-moon and hides behind the Tree or Grove of the Underworld; the Moon pursues, and, sinking in her turn, is sunslain.*

Robert Brown  
The Unicorn:  
A Mythological Investigation (1881)



*design from The Horn of Ulph (c. 1000)*



Pisanello  
Bronze medal to  
Cecilia Gonzaga (c. 1400)

*Regarding the three-legged ass they say that it stands amid the wide-formed ocean, and its feet are three, eyes six, mouths nine, ears two, and horn one. Body white, food spiritual, and it is righteous. . . . The horn is as it were of pure gold, and hollow. . . . With that horn it will vanquish and dissipate all the vile corruption due to the efforts of noxious creatures. When that ass shall hold its neck in the ocean its ears will terrify, and all the water of the wide-formed ocean will shake with agitation. . . . If, O three-legged ass! you were not created for the water, all the water in the sea would have perished from the contamination which the poison of the Evil Spirit brought into its water through the death of the creatures of Ahuramazd.*

*Sacred Books of the East-Persia  
Bundahis*



*from Book of Hours for Simon Vostre (Paris, 1498)*

*Far on the edge of the world and beyond the banks of the Ganges, Savage and lone, is a place in the realm of the King of the Hindus. . . . Where there is born a beast as large as a stag in stature, Dark on the back, solid-hoofed, very fierce, and shaped like a bullock. Mighty and black is the horn that springs from the animal's forehead, Terrible unto his foe, a defence and a weapon of onslaught. Often the poisoners steal to the banks of that swift-flowing river, Fouling the waves with disease by their secret insidious poisons; After them comes this beast and dips his horn in the water, Cleansing the venom away and leaving the stream to flow purely So that the forest-dwellers may drink once more by the margin. Also men say that the beast delights in the embrace of a virgin, Falling asleep in her arms and taking sweet rest on her bosom. Ah! but, awaking, he finds he is bound by ropes and by shackles. Strange is the tale, indeed, yet so, they say, he is taken, Whether it be that the seeds of love have been sown by great Nature Deep in his blood or for some more hidden mysterious reason.*

*Natalis Comes  
De Venatione (1551)*

*facing page  
"Sight," from a Gobelin tapestry (c. 1500)  
Reproduced with permission of the Museum of Cluny*









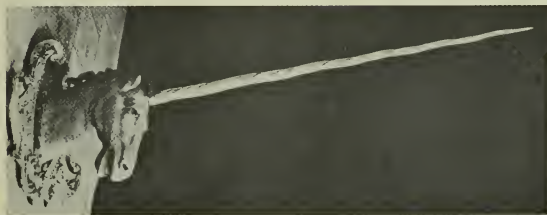


from Nicolas Reusner's Emblemata (1584)

Near the field of Helyon there is a river called Marah, the water of which is very bitter, into which Moses struck his staff and made the water sweet so that the Children of Israel might drink. And even in our times, it is said, venomous animals poison that water after the setting of the sun, so that the good animals cannot drink of it; but in the morning, after the sunrise, comes the unicorn and dips his horn into the stream, driving the poison from it so that the good animals can drink there during the day. This I have seen myself.

John of Hesse  
Itinerarium (1499)

Apothecary's sign from Rottenbuch (c. 1750)



Noble and powerful against all poisonous and pestilential diseases is the unicorn's horn. Kings and princes and men of wealth all own it, and they should preserve it for the use of future generations. Furthermore, as I know from personal experience, it is highly effective against poisons and all malignant evils.

Palmarius Constantius  
De Peste (1610)



*Even to-day the venomous animals poison the water after the going down of the sun, so that the good animals cannot drink of it; but in the morning after sunrise comes the unicorn, and he, dipping his horn in the stream, expels the poison so that during the daytime the other animals may drink.*

John of Hesse  
Itinerarium (1499)

*Monoceros is a beast with one horne, called therefore by the name of an unicorn . . . which hath naturally but one horne, and that a very rich one, which groweth out of the middle of his forehead, being a horne of such virtue as is in no beast's horne besides; which, while some have gone about to deny, they have secretly blinded the eyes of the world from their full view of the greatness of God's works. . . . This horne hath many sovereign virtues, insomuch that being put upon a table furnished with many junkets and banqueting dishes, it will quickly descie whether there be any poyson or venime among them, for if there be the horne is presently covered with a kind of sweat or dew.*

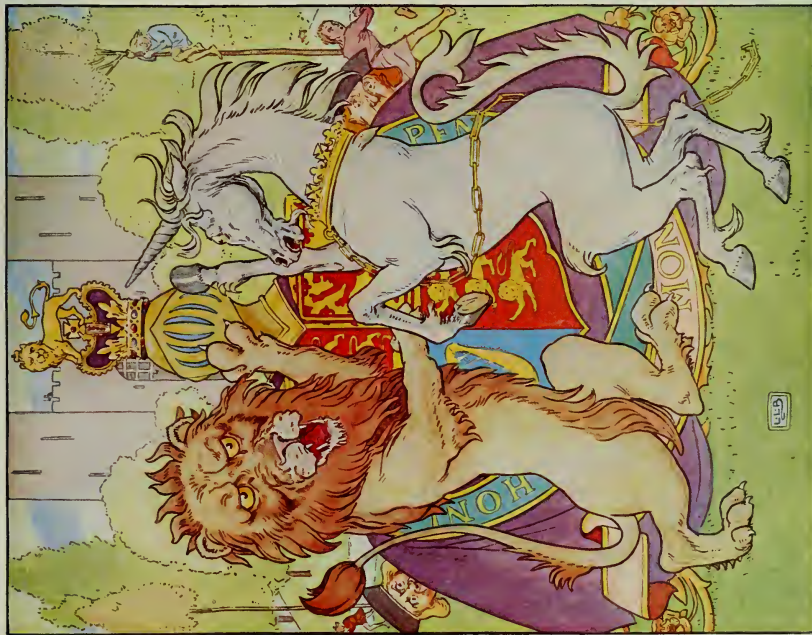
John Swan  
Speculum Mundi (1635)



Vincenzo Coronelli, Unicorn constellation from a celestial sphere  
(c. 1700) Stadtmuseum, Cologne

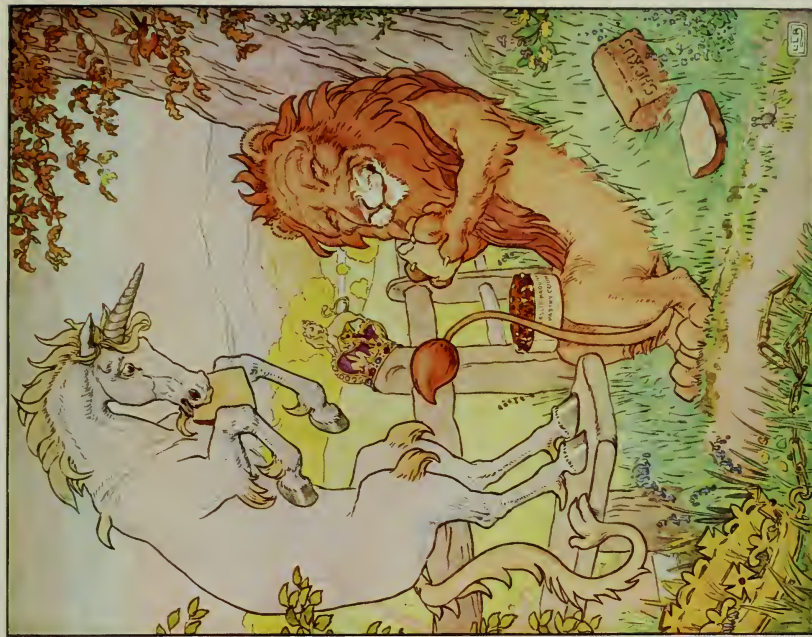
*The "Unicorn" is a southern constellation lying between Caius Minor and Caius Major.*

facing page:  
L. Leslie Brooke  
from Ring O' Roses (1922)



*The Lion and the Unicorn  
Were fighting for the Crown;*

*The Lion chased the Unicorn  
All around the town.*



*Some gave them white bread,  
Some gave them brown,*

*Some gave them plum cake  
And drummed them out of town.*





## In Praise of Unicorns

*"The Lion and the Unicorn were fighting for the crown:  
The lion beat the Unicorn all round the town." . . .*

In the golden book of wit and wisdom, Through the Looking-Glass, the Unicorn rather disdainfully remarks that he had believed children to be fabulous monsters. Alice smilingly retorts: "Do you know, I always thought Unicorns were fabulous monsters, too? I never saw one alive before!" "Well, now that we have seen each other," said the Unicorn, "if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you, Is that a bargain?" "Yes, if you like," said Alice. No such ambiguous bargains are needed to demonstrate the existence of Unicorns. That is, not for imaginative people. A mythical monster, a heraldic animal, he figures in the dictionary as the Monoceros, habitat, India; and he is the biblical Urus, sporting one horn, a goat beard and a lion's tail. He may be all these things for practical persons; no man is a genius to his wife. But maugre that he is something more for dreamers of dreams; though not the Hippogriff, with its liberating wings, volplaning through the Fourth Dimension of Space; nor yet is he tender Undine, spirit of fountains, of whom the Unicorn asked: "By the water of what valley has jealous mankind hidden the source of your secrets?" (Cousin german to the Centaur of Maurice of Guérin, he can speak in like cadence.)

Alice with her "dreaming eyes of wonder" was, after the manner of little girls, somewhat pragmatic. She believed in Unicorns only when she saw one. Yet we must believe without such proof. Has not the Book of Job put this question: "Canst thou bind the Unicorn with his band in the furrow?" As if a harnessed Unicorn would be credible. We prefer placing the charming monster, with the prancing tiny hoofs of ivory (surely Chopin set him to musical notation in his capricious second Etude in F; Chopin who, if man were soulless, would have endowed him with one) in the same category as the Chimera of "The Temptation of St. Antony," which thus taunted the Sphinx: "I am light and joyous! I offer to the eyes of men dazzling perspectives with Paradise in the clouds above. . . . I seek for new perfumes, for vaster flowers, for pleasures never felt before. . . ."

With Unicorns we feel the nostalgia of the infinite, the sorcery of dolls, the salt of sex, the vertigo of them that skirt the edge of perilous ravines, or straddle the rim of finer issues. He dwells in equivocal twilights; and he can stare the sun out of countenance. The enchanting Unicorn boasts no favoured zone. He runs around the globe. He is of all ages and climes. He knows that fantastic land of Gautier, which contains all the divine lost landscapes ever painted, and whose inhabitants are the lovely figures created by art in granite, marble, or wood, on walls, canvas, or crystal. Betimes he flashes by the nymph in the brake, and dazzled, she sighs with desire. Mallarmé set him to cryptic harmonies, and placed him in a dim rich forest (though he called him a

faun; a faun in retorsion). Like the apocryphal Sadhuzag in Flaubert's cosmical drama of dreams, which bore seventy-four hollow antlers from which issued music of ineffable sweetness, our Unicorn sings ravishing melodies for those who possess the inner ear of mystics and poets. When angered he echoes the Seven Thunders of the Apocalypse, and we hear of desperate rumours of fire, flood, and disaster. And he haunts those ivory gates of sleep whence come ineffable dreams of mortals.

He has always fought with the Lion for the crown, and he is always defeated, but invariably claims the victory. The crown is Art, and the Lion, being a realist born, is only attracted by its glitter, not the symbol. The Unicorn, an idealist, divines the inner meaning of this precious fillet of gold. Art is the modern philosopher's stone, and the most brilliant jewel in this much-contested crown. Eternal is the conflict of the Real and the Ideal; Aristotle and Plato; Alice and the Unicorn; the practical and the poetic; butterflies and geese; and rare roast-beef versus the impossible blue rose. And neither the Lion nor the Unicorn has yet fought the battle decisive. Perhaps the day may come when, weariness invading their very bones, they may realise that they are as different sides of the same coveted shield; matter and spirit, the multitude and the individual. Then unlock the ivory tower, abolish the tyrannies of superannuated superstitions, and give the people vision, without which they perish. The divine rights of humanity, no longer of kingly cabbages.

The dusk of the future is washed with the silver of hope. The Lion and the Unicorn in single yoke. Strength and Beauty should represent the fusion of the Ideal and the Real. There should be no anarchy, no socialism, no Brotherhood or Sisterhood of mankind, just the millennium of sense and sentiment. What title shall we give that far-away time, that longed-for Utopia? With Alice and the Faun we forget names, so let us follow her method when in doubt, and exclaim: "Here then! Here then!" Morose and disillusioned souls may cry aloud: "Ah! to see behind us no longer, on the Lake of Eternity, the implacable Wake of Time!" nevertheless, we must believe in the reality of our Unicorn. He is Pan. He is Puck. He is Shelley. He is Ariel. He is Whim. He is Irony. And he can boast with Emerson:

"I am owner of the sphere,  
Of the seven stars and the solar year,  
Of Caesar's hand and Plato's brain,  
Of Lord Christ's heart and Shakespeare's strain."      From *Unicorns*  
by James Huneker

facing page:  
*The Invisible Unicorn*  
by Leonard Baskin

From *Hosie's Alphabet*, pictures by Leonard Baskin, Words by Hosea, Tobias, & Lisa Baskin. Copyright 1972 in all countries of the International Copyright Union by Leonard Baskin.  
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*"He gallops across the forest green  
So quickly that he's seldom seen  
Where Peacocks their blue feathers preen  
And strawberries grow wild."*

*"Unicorn," by William Jay Smith*



*Fifteenth century, probably Dutch*

*"In the midnight forest the dark oak trees are still under the stars. The pale wildflowers in the clearing have furled their petals for the night. Suddenly he appears, a milk-white creature with the proud form of a horse. You may not notice his cloven hoofs or curling beard, but you see the curved neck, the silver mane, the graceful tail. Then he moves his head, and the moonlight runs like sea water along the pearly spiral of his horn. There is no sound, but at the next heart-beat the clearing is once again empty of all but the night."*

*— from The Beasts of Never by Georgess McHargue*

First there entered the hall a unicorn large as a horse and fully caparisoned in a silken cloth bearing the arms of England painted thereon. Seated on the beast was a very fine painted leopard almost true to life; in one forepaw it carried a huge banner of England and in the other a beautifully fabricated marguerite. Now the unicorn having made its way around the tables to the sound of clarions, was led in front of my master the Duke, and one of the ducal stewards thereupon plucked the blossom from the leopard's claw and kneeling addressed the Duke, "Most mighty, noble and conquering Prince, my honored and worshipful Lord and Sovereign! The proud and fear-inspiring leopard of England visiting this honorable assemblage presents for the delight of Your noble self, Your allies, realms and subjects, to You in person a Marguerite (Margaret) of noble brith." Thus did my master receive the noble Margaret, and the unicorn returned thither whence he had come.

Olivier de la Marche (15th Century)  
Memoirs of the Court of Burgundy



by Dorothy Lathrop

from *The Colt from Moon Mountain*

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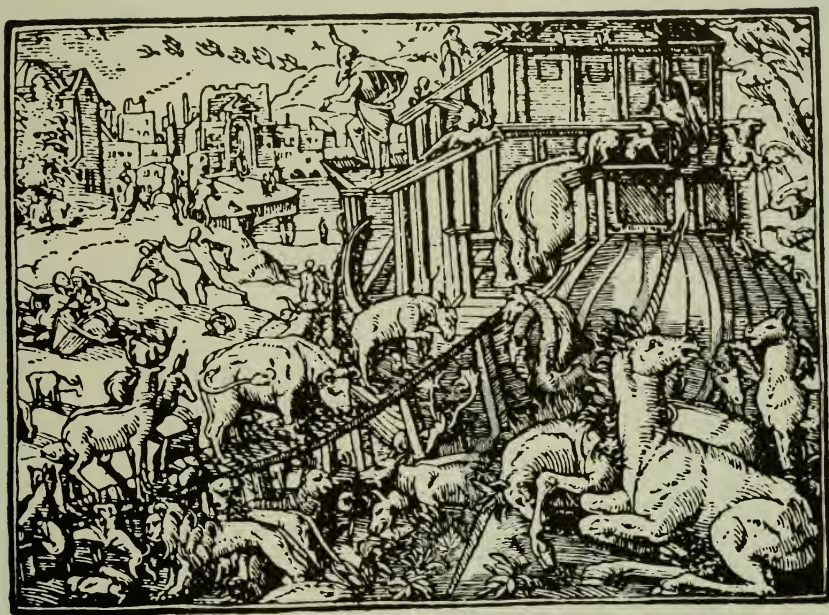
facing page:

Bill and Lyn Teeple (1977)









Tobias Stimmer  
from *Neue Christliche Figuren Biblischer Historien* (Basel, 1576)

### THE SAILING OF THE ARK

*The sky was low, the sounding rain was falling dense and dark,  
And Noah's sons were standing at the window of the Ark.*

*The beasts were in, but Japhet said "I see one creature more  
Belated and unmated there comes knocking at the door."*

*"Well, let him knock, or let him drown" said Ham, "or learn to swim;  
We're overcrowded as it is. We've got no room for him."*

*"And yet it knocks. How terribly it knocks," said Shem. "Its feet  
Are hard as horns. And O, the air from it is sweet."*

*"Now hush!" said Ham, "You'll waken Dad, and once he comes to see  
What's at the door, it's sure to mean more work for you and me."*

*Noah's voice came roaring from the darkness down below:*

*"Some animal is knocking. Let it in before we go."*

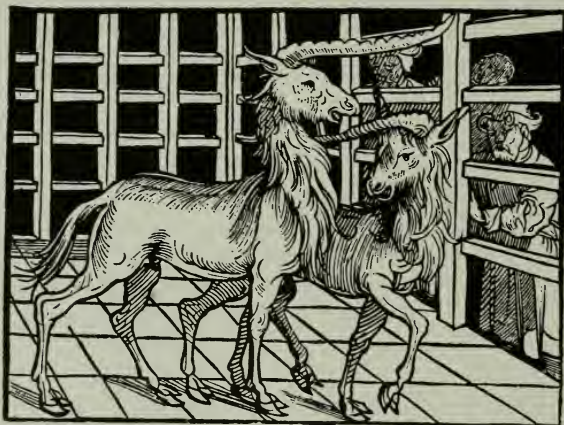
*Ham shouted back (and savagely he nudged the other two)*

*"That's only Japhet knocking down a bradnail in his shoe."*

Said Noah, "Boys, I hear a noise that's like a horse's hoof."  
 Said Ham, "Why, that's the dreadful rain that drums upon the roof."  
 Noah tumbled up on deck, and out he puts his head.  
 His face grew white, his knees were loosed, he tore his beard and said,  
 "Look, look! It would not wait. It turns away. It takes its flight  
 Fine work you've made of it, my sons, between you all to-night.  
 O noble and unmated beast, my sons were all unkind.  
 In such a night, what stable and what manger will you find.  
 O golden hoofs, O cataracts of mane, O nostrils wide  
 With high disdain, and O the neck wave-arched, the lovely pride!  
 O long shall be the furrows ploughed upon the hearts of men  
 Before it comes to stable and to manger once again.  
 And dark and crooked all the roads in which our race will walk,  
 And Shrivelled all their manhood like a flower on broken stalk.  
 Now all the world, O Ham, may curse the hour that you were born –  
 Because of you, the Ark must sail without the Unicorn."

—N.W.

From Punch 1948



by Jörg Breu d.Ä. from Ritterlich und lobwirdig Rayss L. Vartoman (Augsburg, 1515)

facing page:

"Amanda is dreaming of Dragons"

Mercer Mayer

from Amanda Dreaming

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A Unicorn, straight out of a Bestiary unmodified, is one fabulous beast who can never appear homely, or quite tamed. Even centaurs may be domesticated with some difficulty, but Unicorns resist—they are always unattainable, unique, a distant flash of white among the trees, a vision of a firebird that can never be caught. As such, they appear in various stories—in Elizabeth Goudge's *The Little White Horse*, 1946, the Unicorn appears mysteriously and vanishes like a dream: 'For one flashing moment she saw him perfectly, clear cut as a cameo against the darkness, and the proud curve of the neck, the flowing white mane and tail, the flash of the silver hoofs were utterly strange and yet utterly familiar.' . . . It is no accident that the Unicorn, Jewel, is Tirian the king's dearest friend in C. S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*, 1956. 'They loved each other like brothers and had each saved the other's life in the wars.' It is Jewel who is given the great affirmative Credo at the end when all the redeemed characters have passed into heaven: 'He stamped his right fore-hoof on the ground and neighed, and then cried: "I have come here at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life though I never knew it till now."' "

Margaret Blount,  
*Animal Land, The Creatures of Children's Fiction* (Morrow, 1975)



Margaret Tarrant  
from *An Alphabet of Magic* (1928)



*Marginal decoration from a book of hours (Paris, 1504)*

*The higher and the enduring values of a belief—the faiths that we call religious provide the best examples—do not depend at all upon its congruity with actual fact, but upon its sway over the human heart and mind. They are grounded not upon fact, but upon what even we may perhaps still call “the truth.” The question of historicity and actuality with regard to gods and unicorns is a relatively trifling matter which may be left to antiquarians and biologists, for both the god and the unicorn had a business to perform greater than any mere existence in the flesh could explain or provide a basis for. We wrong ourselves when we insist that if they cannot make good their flesh-and-blood actuality on our level we will have none of them.*

*Odell Shepard,  
The Lore of the Unicorn*



*by Melchior Lechter*







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